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ABSTRACT

This document presents the final report from a 2-year investigation conducted by a College Board-appointed commission to examine the provision of precollege guidance and counseling in schools in the United States. The first section of the report contains a summary of the commission's work and lists four priority recommendations and four other recommendations for action in the schools. The second section examines each of the four priority recommendations individually and in detail. Recommendations discussed in this section concern: (1) establishing a kindergarten through grade 12 comprehensive and developmental model of precollege guidance and counseling; (2) making guidance counselors central rather than peripheral to teaching and learning in the schools; (3) making greater efforts to involve parents; and (4) providing students with earlier and more consistent access to counseling. The third section of the report examines the other four recommendations individually, three of which address the need for a commitment of support and collaboration of resources at the community, state, and federal levels, and one which calls for a revision of counselor training programs to include the skills and knowledge needed to carry out the proposed model of precollege guidance and counseling. An appendix contains a synopsis of the commission's interim report. (NB)

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FINAL REPORT

ED275948

Keeping The Options Open

RECOMMENDATIONS

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Commission on Precollege Guidance and Counseling

THE COLLEGE BOARD

Keeping The Options Open

RECOMMENDATIONS

Final Report of the Commission on Precollege Guidance and Counseling

October 1986

COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMINATION BOARD, NEW YORK

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Inquiries concerning this report should be addressed to the Commission on Precollege Guidance and Counseling, The College Board, 45 Columbus Avenue, New York, New York 10023-6917.

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Foreword

The Commission on Precollege Guidance and Counseling extends a long-standing tradition of the College Board. When a significant problem related to its mission is identified and no other agency appears to be addressing it, the College Board appoints a commission of knowledgeable individuals to wrestle with it independently and in the public interest. The Commissions on Mathematics (1955-59), English (1959-64), Tests (1967-69), and Non-Traditional Study (1970-72), are cases in point.

The problem that this latest Commission was asked to study is the uneven quality that characterizes precollege guidance and counseling services available to high school students today. That condition was identified in 1983 in the aftermath of a series of reports on the sorry quality of secondary education in the United States. Those reports focused on what their authors considered the essentials of education—administration, teaching, and curriculum. Guidance and counseling services, if mentioned at all, were treated as peripheral, outside the mainstream of schooling. Yet it would be ironic if the current efforts at reform generated by those reports succeed only to find many students denied the benefits of the new-found quality because of inadequate counseling services.

It was in the hope of being able to avert this outcome that the College Board's Trustees authorized the appointment of the Commission on Precollege Guidance and Counseling in 1984. The College Board is grateful to the members of the Commission for their tireless efforts on behalf of the nation's youth, and especially to Harold Howe II, our chairman, who devoted hours far beyond those we had anticipated in the Commission's cause; to Aaron Fink, senior consultant to the Commission, who served as chief of staff; and to the late John J. O'Hearne, senior associate in my office at the Board, who operated as staff liaison. Their efforts should serve well in "Keeping the Options Open."

George H. Hanford
President
The College Board

October 1986

Acknowledgments

For all of us on the Commission, this exercise has been stimulating. We are indebted to the College Board for its comprehensive support of our work. George Hanford, president of the College Board, was an active member of our Commission. Aaron Fink, and Jack O'Hearne of the Board's staff gave much of their time over a two-year period to working on this study.

Sadly, we report Jack O'Hearne's sudden death in June 1986 as he was working with us on this document. Jack's long-term association with the College Board was marked both by his sense of commitment and his sense of humor. We are especially indebted to him for his valuable contributions to our deliberations.

We are also grateful to our special colleagues, Bruce Astrein and Adria Steinberg of Centre Research, Inc. in Boston. They assisted in many aspects of our two-year investigation, attended all of the meetings of the Commission, contributed to the synthesis of our ideas, and prepared drafts of the final report for our consideration. In addition, Jean Yoder of the College Board's Communications staff provided her editorial talents to make our educational jargon more readable and in the process helped us meet publication deadlines we never could have attained without her.

Finally, we would like to note that George Hanford is retiring from his position as president of the College Board shortly after this publication appears. We cannot resist using this space to thank him for his work with us, and more importantly for his contribution to American schools and colleges and educational policies over many years. We invited him to take off his hat as a member of our Commission and put on that of president of the College Board to write a Foreword for this final report.

This document and the interim report, entitled *Keeping the Options Open: An Overview,* which preceded it in January 1986, are subscribed to by all of the members of the Commission. If there are errors of omission or commission they belong to us, not to the College Board, which has given us a free hand.

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Note

All references used in the preparation of the two reports that constitute the work of the Commission on Precollege Guidance and Counseling are contained in *Keeping the Options Open: An Overview.* Also listed in that interim report are the names of those invited to participate in the several dialogues held by the Commission throughout the country during the first year of this study.

Two special reports, which have contributed to an understanding of issues central to this inquiry, were prepared at the request of the Commission:

> "A Descriptive Study of Public High School Guidance," based upon data from the 1980-82 longitudinal study, *High School and Beyond,* prepared by Ruth B. Ekstrom, Educational Testing Service, June 1985.
>
> "School Counselor Training in Precollege Guidance and Counseling," a background paper prepared for the Commission by Edwin L. Herr, The Pennsylvania State University, February 1986.

Information concerning the availability of these studies may be obtained by writing to: The Commission on Precollege Guidance and Counseling, The College Board, 45 Columbus Avenue, New York, New York 10023-6917.

A subsequent report by Ruth B. Ekstrom and Valerie E. Lee, *Student Access to Guidance and Counseling in High School,* jointly supported by the College Board Commission on Precollege Guidance and Counseling and the Educational Testing Service, provides additional information beyond that discussed in the Ekstrom study noted above. Requests for reprints of this report should be addressed to Ruth B. Ekstrom, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey 08541.

Setting the Stage: A Summary of the Commission's Work

A Special Imperative For Guidance and Counseling

When the Trustees of the College Board appointed the Commission in the fall of 1984, they asked for an examination of precollege guidance and counseling, with special attention to those students with "limited access to postsecondary education." In the interim report issued in January 1986 and in this final report, we have taken that request seriously. Both of these documents share the same title, *Keeping the Options Open*, a phrase intended to convey our belief that guidance and counseling services can make a valuable contribution to helping all children and youth succeed in school.

Many school reforms have been proposed and enacted in the past few years in the name of achieving excellence in the public schools. While this reform movement has successfully returned public education to the national agenda, it has brought neither increased attention to nor support for guidance and counseling in the schools. In fact, the topic of guidance and counseling has largely been ignored. We think this is an unfortunate omission with serious consequences for children.

School reform movement ignores guidance and counseling

Schools should be caring environments in which students are respected and supported both as learners and human beings. All young people need such schools, but particularly the increasing number who suffer disadvantages from poverty, discrimination, and family stress or disruption. Yet, we have not heard from educational leaders about the importance of this basic need as much as we have about new requirements, more tests, and longer school hours. The Commission believes that many students become discouraged as a result of the ways schools are now operated, and that improved guidance and counseling in the schools can contribute significantly to reducing the considerable waste of human talent noted in our initial report.

We are told by many thoughtful analysts, most recently the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, that the nation's economic future depends upon higher levels of educational attainment among those now at the bottom of the economic ladder. In the years immediately ahead, the traditional age group providing college applicants will decrease in number, while

the proportion of the age group that is economically disadvantaged will continue to grow and include more black, Hispanic, and immigrant children. Unless students from these segments of society are prepared and encouraged to enter higher education, the percentage of college graduates among the adult labor force will decline. Such a decline poses a threat to our standard of living, the development of our communities, and the nation's ability to compete successfully with other countries.

Promise of equal educational opportunity made, but not *kept*

The country's future economic health provides a powerful imperative for improvement of guidance and counseling functions in the schools. We would add what we believe is another equally important argument—the entitlement of children to a public education that meets their abilities and needs. Flagrant violations of justice too often have been inflicted on minority groups in this country. The promise of equal educational opportunity has been made, but not kept. Better counseling and guidance services in schools constitute an important element in making that promise a reality for *all* students.

Findings

The views of the Commission were formulated during a two-year investigation into the condition of guidance and counseling in the nation's schools. We held dialogues in different regions of the country with counselors, teachers, parents, school administrators, school board members, college admissions officers, and people from community youth-serving agencies. In several of these regions, we also engaged in special discussions with high school and college students, and we followed up the dialogues by visiting special school programs. Through these activities, the Commission became cognizant of major themes and issues that shaped our thinking. They were supported by other aspects of our research.

In order to engage in an in-depth examination of several of these themes, we commissioned two special studies—one on the preparation and professional development of counselors; and another on access to guidance and counseling, drawing on data from the *High School and Beyond* longitudinal study of 1980 and 1982, which was derived from responses of 30,000 students in 1,000 public high schools.* In addition, the Commission conducted a broad review of recent writings from authorities in the counseling field and consulted with officers of the major professional organizations for counselors and admissions officers.

A full account of the Commission's investigation appears in its interim report, entitled *Keeping the Options Open: An Overview,* which describes in detail both the needs of students and the condition of counseling in American schools today. In this report, a synopsis of which appears in the Appendix, we made several major observations:

- **Adequate counseling and guidance services are essential for all students, particularly for those who suffer disadvantages from**

*See Note on page xi concerning the availability of these reports.

poverty, discrimination, and family stress or disruption.
Guidance and counseling services are provided within schools to guide students toward improved self-understanding, better use of their talents, and increased knowledge of the options open to them—all crucial to making informed decisions about important choices in school and beyond. Learning failures among students frequently are caused by lack of support from school and family rather than by lack of ability. While many students receive encouragement and assistance from a variety of sources, most notably their families, increasing pressures on families—and changing family patterns—are undermining this important source of support and placing more of the burden on the schools and other community agencies.

- **Counseling is a profession in trouble.**
  Too often counselors are assigned tasks—administrative routines, maintaining records, and supervising students—that make inadequate use of their special skills and talents. In many states the student/counselor ratios are rising beyond the level at which counselors can perform effectively, with school boards frequently regarding counselors as expendable in a fiscal pinch. Paradoxically, this erosion of support for guidance and counseling is occurring at a time of urgent concern about the increasing school dropout rate and numerous calls for dropout prevention programs that involve counseling and a wide range of support services in and out of the schools.

Those who need most help get least in schools

- **Provision for guidance and counseling follows an all too well-established pattern in the distribution of public services: Those with the least at home often get the least help from public institutions and programs.**
  Specifically, we have found that those students who come from families and communities where knowledge of the consequences of different course and curricular choices is limited are least likely to have access to informed guidance and counseling in school. When the relative need for guidance and counseling is considered, this maldistribution is especially damaging. The resulting waste of human potential is indicated by a rising school dropout rate and a significant decline in college enrollment among black and Hispanic students. The alarming statistics related to these changes are noted in our interim report.

Recommendations

In the interim report we pointed to "the perpetuation of disadvantage" in the schools and the potential danger of a dual school system in the United States, one to serve the children of poor people and another for the more fortunate students. The recommendations in this report apply to both these groups, but are needed especially to redress the imbalance of public provision for the education of those least well-served today.

In this final report we assume, as we did in the earlier document, that pre-college guidance and counseling should not be defined narrowly in terms of helping high school students learn about and make decisions relating to col-

lege. Instead we see precollege guidance and counseling as encompassing a broad set of support functions* that can enhance success in school, increasing the chances for formal learning beyond high school. Therefore, we have emphasized the importance of elementary and junior high school guidance as well as various arrangements—in and out of the schools—which help high school students not only to succeed academically, but also to learn about colleges and how to pay for them.

Services in and out of schools can help students succeed

The Commission recognizes that it has left some important matters unstudied, and we flag them here for attention by others. We have not included in our study the growing population of nontraditional students who enter college after the age of 21, frequently on a part-time basis. Nor have we explored what happens to those leaving the military service and why such a small proportion take advantage of the college support offered. Finally, we have touched upon, but not fully explored, the large number of students who leave college before completing their planned programs. Most college attrition occurs in the first two years of college, and a high proportion of it occurs among students from low-income families, many from minority groups. We believe that improvements in academic preparation for college, as well as the improvements in precollege guidance and counseling recommended here, will address many aspects of this problem, but college-initiated remedies are needed as well. Other responses to the problem fall in the public policy realm, particularly in the provision of student aid by state and federal government. We have included some recommendations about information and counseling programs that deserve federal support.

The Commission has arrived at its recommendations through a process of group deliberation. Following our dialogues around the country, we held two comprehensive and searching sessions in order to reach agreement on major recommendations. Our assessment of how to improve precollege guidance and counseling represents our best judgment on how to address the needs and problems identified in our investigation. We also received much useful advice and comment, and many informative letters, from those who attended regional meetings of the College Board in the winter of 1986, when we presented the preliminary findings published in the interim report. Finally, almost all members of the Commission have worked at one time in schools as teachers, administrators, or counselors. This accumulated experience was an asset in formulating a collective view of this complex topic.

Our recommendations are made to those who must make decisions about counseling and guidance both in schools and more widely in communities. Counselors, teachers, principals, school superintendents, school board members, and state education officers will find suggestions here for their agendas. So will the United States Department of Education. Parents, as well as those

* The broad support functions we refer to are usually defined in the following way: Guidance consists of support services to help students gain understanding of their social, intellectual, and emotional development; become knowledgeable about educational, occupational, and social opportunities; learn decision-making and planning skills; and combine these insights into personal plans of action. Counseling, as one aspect of guidance, focuses primarily on communication between counselors and students about issues that facilitate or inhibit personal planning, feelings of self-esteem, achievement, and choice.

working in the schools, may want to review our interim report to read what students had to say about their parents' role in decisions about college. Changes recommended in counselor preparation programs should interest graduate schools of education. Staff members in community agencies serving children and families will find sections of this report have special relevance for them, and so will businesses, colleges, and foundations that want to establish programs to enhance the future options of disadvantaged youth.

The Commission makes four priority recommendations for action in the schools.

Priorities for the schools

1. Establish a broad-based process in each local school district for determining the particular guidance and counseling needs of the students within each school and for planning how best to meet these needs.

If students are to be well-served, guidance and counseling services must be more than an ad hoc series of activities. A school-based planning process provides a mechanism for rationally determining the particular and diverse needs of students within each school. The process should involve those who might provide services and resources as well as those who will benefit from them—counselors, teachers, parents, principals, students, and people from community agencies. School district plans should encourage the planning process in individual schools and provide for its funding, technical support, and evaluation.

2. Develop a program under the leadership of each school principal that emphasizes the importance of the guidance counselor as a monitor and promoter of student potential, as well as coordinator of the school's guidance plan.

Counselors should be viewed primarily as educators who can make unique contributions to improve the learning climate of the school, the educational performance of students, and links to families. No school can employ enough counselors to do what is needed by themselves. Also, not all functions of guidance and counseling need to be performed by professionally trained counselors. As leaders of a team of professionals, counselors should become orchestrators of all guidance activities deemed essential in and out of the schools.

3. Mount programs to inform and involve parents and other members of the family influential in the choices, plans, decisions, and learning activities of the student.

Young people, especially those who suffer from poverty and discrimination, need an integrated family-school support system. The partnership we recommend goes deeper than the usual school request that parents support students in doing their homework. It includes close communication between home and school about student progress in both personal maturity and academic performance. The school also should provide more and earlier information for parents and students about future options. Imaginative planning by counselors is needed in order to accomplish these goals.

4. Provide a program of guidance and counseling during the early and middle years of schooling, especially for students who traditionally have not been well-served by the schools.
For many students, school counseling is "too little too late." These students need earlier recognition of their needs and earlier intervention in dealing with them. They need opportunities to talk with counselors about college and careers and the nature of preparation for various futures during the crucial middle years of schooling. Early recognition of special learning needs of individual students can also lead to the prompt prescription of remedial help when indicated, rather than waiting until a student is totally discouraged.

The Commission also makes four other major recommendations that involve a variety of actors and institutions outside the schools and that provide essential support for school-based changes.

Support for school-based changes

5. Strengthen collaboration among schools, community agencies, colleges, businesses, and other community resources to enhance services available to students.

6. Establish a process in each state to determine the guidance and counseling needs of specific student populations and give support to local initatives that address these needs.

7. Increase support of federal programs that help disadvantaged students to enter and remain in college.

8. Revise the training of school counselors to include the specific skills and knowledge necessary to enable them to take a more central role in schools.

Within each of the areas noted here we have identified subsidiary recommendations that relate to the conduct of precollege guidance and counseling in the schools, as well as in the institutions that support them.

Action in the Schools

The four priority recommendations we make are at the heart of what we believe precollege guidance and counseling can and should be. Two of these recommendations are directed at establishing a model of precollege guidance and counseling that is comprehensive and developmental from kindergarten through twelfth grade, and in which guidance counselors are central rather than peripheral to teaching and learning in the schools. We believe that these changes are urgently needed to serve the real needs of students, to stem the erosion of support for guidance and counseling, to help schools make maximum use of the guidance and counseling resources that are available, and ultimately to enable schools to argue persuasively for additional resources for guidance services. We are encouraged by the fact that there is already some support for such changes among counseling professionals.

The other two priority recommendations emerge from our special concern for improving guidance and counseling for students who traditionally have not been well-served by the schools. A reconceptualization of guidance and counseling is necessary, but not sufficient to address the inequities in the access to services that we have found. We call upon schools to make greater efforts to involve parents particularly, and to provide earlier and more consistent access to counselors, especially at periods of academic transition. We believe these changes will have a significant effect on the school's ability to serve disadvantaged students.

1. Establish a broad-based process in each local school district for determining the particular guidance and counseling needs of the students within each school and for planning how best to meet these needs.

Establishing a School Plan

Every school, regardless of the number of counselors or pupil personnel staff and regardless of the grade levels of the students, needs to plan how to create a supportive environment that enhances learning, thereby enlarging opportunity for all students. Every school also needs to plan how to develop and sustain the consciousness of both students and their parents of college as a possibility.

These goals are fundamental to the mission of the school. Yet there may be no forum where they are discussed—and no job description in which they are included. In too many schools the guidance and counseling program consists of a set of loosely related services performed almost exclusively by counselors. As new student needs are identified, new tasks may be added to the counselors' workload, allowing students to "fall through the cracks," and leaving staff frustrated and feeling ineffectual.

We believe that a defined planning process will lead to a very different approach and a different configuration of services. We encourage schools to structure a planning process around five very basic questions:

- What guidance and counseling functions are needed by the various populations of students in this school?
- How and by whom will these functions be performed? By counselors? By teachers? By others in—and outside—the school?
- How can the school work closely with parents and others to help young people make choices and decisions that will enrich rather than diminish their lives?
- What specific results (student outcomes) are desired?
- What means will be employed to determine whether the desired results have been achieved?

Ideally, the planning process should be based in every school building, with guidelines, support, and assistance from the school district. While individual schools can initiate such a process themselves, the role of the school district is important in establishing a continuity of experience for students from kindergarten through high school, and in ensuring that all students in all schools and at all levels of ability have access to the services that they need. Without inhibiting school-based planning, the district can perform a variety of valuable functions, including:

- Suggesting options for individual schools to consider in determining what they will do.
- Providing technical assistance to schools in carrying out their assessment of needs and evaluation.
- Providing special allocations of resources to schools serving large numbers of "at-risk" students.
- Periodically reviewing the school plans.
- Identifying elements that should be coordinated across and among schools.

Planning viewed as bureaucratic gains nothing

The emphasis of this recommendation is on the process of planning as well as on the product. If planning is viewed as a bureaucratic requirement culminating in a form being filled out by the principal or counselor each year for submission to the superintendent, the schools and the students will gain nothing. There must be specific guidelines for planning that delineate both who will be involved and represented in the planning process, and how the process will be structured and supported to encourage active participation.

The credibility and effectiveness of the school plan requires the involvement of a broad spectrum of people. The planning process should include representatives of all who will implement the plan and be affected by it—counselors, teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, students, and parents, with consultation and advice from community service agencies, local colleges, and businesses. Even within a single school, important differences exist among the populations to be served. An inclusive process will enable schools to identify and address the needs and priorities of all students, and help schools to avoid the pitfall of a single school model or prescription of services for all.

Paradoxically, some of the best examples we have found of such broad-based planning have been in a select number of schools in which there has been a sharp reduction in the number of counselors. In these instances, the schools have sought to assess all sources of assistance in order to determine how they could best provide essential guidance and counseling functions. We believe that all schools, regardless of their resources, have the capacity to carry out such planning, and that everyone in the school community—students, counselors, teachers, and parents—will benefit greatly from it.

Important to demonstrate how counseling makes a difference

The fact that counseling is on the defensive makes it especially important to find ways to demonstrate when and how counseling makes a difference. Credibility will be enhanced greatly by determining how the services offered will be evaluated. Both quantitative and qualitative data can be gathered to assess whether desired results have been attained. For example:

- Schools can develop baseline data on such matters as the number of dropouts or proportions of different groups of students taking demanding academic courses, and then measure changes in these areas over time.
- Assessments can be made of academic success and postsecondary choices of different segments of the school population, with follow-up studies of student performance and choice in the early years of college.

- Test data relating to student achievement can be analyzed for its relevance to the guidance program.
- Planning teams could agree upon examples of observable evidence that would demonstrate the student's mastery of particular skills and knowledge engendered by the counseling program.
- More qualitative data could be gathered through structured interviews with students, teachers, administrators, parents, and counselors, i.e. regarding their perceptions of and experiences with guidance and counseling services.

Such data are critical to the planning process, providing feedback necessary for the improvement and modification of services. Ultimately evaluation could also play an important role in convincing people—both in and out of the schools—that well-planned programs of guidance and counseling are essential to educating youth, helping them to make fuller use of their talents and maximum use of the options available to them.

In recent years the most common action of school boards in relation to guidance and counseling has been to reduce program and services. They have done so in response to the tightening of school budgets and statewide measures of fiscal austerity, and sometimes in response to controversy over the value and effectiveness of the services provided. School boards probably will continue such actions until guidance and counseling services are better organized to improve student learning and can be shown to provide access to opportunities presently denied large numbers of students. With the goals of precollege guidance and counseling articulated and an assessment of outcomes available, schools and school district administrators will be in a position to demonstrate the value of these services to school boards and their constituencies.

2. Develop a program under the leadership of each school principal that emphasizes the importance of the guidance counselor as a monitor and promoter of student potential, as well as a coordinator of the school's guidance plan.

A Broader Role for Counselors

The school counselor should be first and foremost an educator, supporting students in their progress through the school and serving as a crucial resource for the academic program. Although counselors may spend much of their time providing direct services to students, both individually and in groups, they also can provide an important service to students indirectly by calling attention to conditions in schools and classrooms that are defeating or frustrating youngsters rather than helping them succeed. Through the nature of their work, counselors develop a sense of the crosscurrents in a school and the way they affect individual students. With the support of principals, they can lead a movement for more academic flexibility and more personal attention to the needs and problems of students.

The role we are suggesting would make counselors key monitors of student progress, developers of student potential, and facilitators of counseling arrangements. Specifically, this role would involve counselors in the following tasks:

- Coordinating the school guidance plan.
- Developing strategies for school staff to use in reaching students whose academic performance has slipped, or who most need assistance in developing self-confidence and in thinking about the future.
- Serving as advocates for students who are at risk of not meeting new standards and requirements, and who may need a second chance at a college-bound program.
- Setting up information systems and developing the curriculum for group advising sessions about such things as college planning and course choices.
- Planning and carrying out projects to inform parents about school objectives and how they can support them.
- Training paraprofessionals and/or volunteers to perform special duties.
- Working with teachers and administrators to enhance their capacities in the areas of guidance and counseling to which they can contribute.
- Developing a bank of community resources to which youngsters with special problems can be referred.

It must be emphasized that our recommendation is to *change* the position and role traditionally assigned to counselors within the school, not to add more responsibilities to their daily routine. As we heard repeatedly in our investigation, there are already "too few counselors trying to do too much for too many." The school planning process provides a vehicle for clarifying what counselors should and should not do. Within the context of the needs and resources outlined in the plan, counselors can assume the functions they are uniquely qualified to perform, while coordinating others in carrying out functions that do not require their professional expertise.

"Too few counselors trying to do too much for too many"

We believe that considerable counselor time is wasted in technical tasks and paperwork and in providing information to students individually that is readily available by more efficient means. Computers, paraprofessional aides, and community volunteers can assist in performing functions that do not require the expertise nor warrant the time of fully trained professionals. We have noted some increase in these services in school systems throughout the country. To date, however, their use has been limited; considerably more needs to be done.

A wide range of computer programs are available that not only reduce the preponderance of administrative and clerical duties currently assigned to counselors, but also assist students in making choices, plans, and decisions related to career and college opportunities. The use of such programs can assist students—particularly those with limited access to other sources of information—in gathering data related to their own interests, talents, and requirements, in evaluating various alternatives, and in monitoring their own progress as they move toward perceived goals. Among other things, paraprofessional aides can assist students and their parents to gather information about postsecondary-school study and move them through the procedures of gaining admission to college and identifying financial aid. Assistance of this sort can be crucial to many students from low-income families who may otherwise dismiss college as being impossible or impractical.

The goal of school systems should be to enhance services to students, not merely to reduce costs or to reduce the role of the counselor. Computers and paraprofessional aides should be viewed as extensions of rather than substitutes for counselors, giving counselors more time for the activities that are central to their role. Students will not even seek information about going to college unless they have the consciousness of college as a possibility. Once they have information, they need help in applying it in a way that enhances their options. Obviously the need for professionally trained counselors will not be diminished.

No magic ratio or formula ensures adequate student services

In developing these ideas we deliberated long and hard about the vexing subject of student/counselor ratios. We have come to the conclusion that there is no magic ratio or numerical formula for ensuring adequate precollege guidance and counseling services for all students. Certainly the ratios of 600:1 or 700:1 that we found in some school districts are too high; the needs of students identified by the Commission cannot be met with so few counselors. While there is a range of people who can contribute to carrying out the counseling function in a school, counselors have unique skills and unique roles that are not replaceable. The counseling profession itself has called for ratios of 250:1. There are some advocates who will argue that for "at-risk" students the need may be for ratios of 50:1 or less. The Commission

believes that this controversy cannot be resolved until the role of the counselor is redefined and the counselor's responsibilities are carried out within the context of the school-based planning process recommended in this report.

A reconsideration of the role of the counselor within the school requires that principals, counselors, and teachers change long-standing relationships, and that they take new risks. If the counselor's role is to change in the direction recommended here, counselors will have to develop closer alliances with teachers and link their work with students more directly to classroom experience. Teachers and principals will have to acknowledge that counselors can make special contributions to improving student academic performance and can work with them to create a healthy climate for learning in the classroom—and in the school as a whole.

School districts must create regular opportunities for counselors, teachers, and administrators to discuss how they will collaborate in serving the needs of the specific student populations in their schools and school district. District-wide staff development programs tend to be organized around subject matter rather than the developmental needs of students. Both are important. The change in focus that we recommend is especially crucial for students and families most at-risk of becoming discouraged in school, thus limiting their options and opportunities. Counselors, teachers, and administrators need particularly to work together to devise strategies for:

Counselors need to link work to classroom experience

- Working collaboratively to improve student performance and interest in school.
- Understanding and addressing the needs of a changing student population.
- Encouraging minority and economically disadvantaged students particularly to continue their education.
- Involving parents in the educational process.
- Forging partnerships with community agencies, business, and universities to better serve the needs and interests of all students.

It is also important to recognize the continuous changes and growing complexities in what precollege counselors need to know if they are to offer students specific, accurate, and timely assistance in choosing, applying to, financing, and adjusting to college. Insofar as principals, department heads, and teachers also act as important resources to parents and students on school curriculum and post-high school options, they too need to be knowledgeable about resources available for precollege guidance. We have encountered regional workshops and summer institutes in which school, college, and community agency people come together to discuss issues common to their work with students and parents. This seems to us a promising approach to dealing with the heavy attrition in early college years, and other complex issues facing young people.

3. Mount programs to inform and involve parents and other members of the family influential in the choices, plans, decisions, and learning activities of the student.

Involving Parents

Parents have a predominant influence on the choices, decisions, and plans of students. This influence is pervasive, consistent, and long-term. There is mounting evidence that parental expectations about what students will do when they finish high school shape students' academic performance, motivation, and aspiration from the early years of schooling through high school and beyond.

Despite this evidence, however, there remains a wide gap between the rhetoric of parental involvement and the development of an effective partnership between schools and parents. Too often the school's translation of parent involvement is limited to encouraging parents to help students with their homework, inviting them to an annual school open-house, or soliciting their help in school events or fund-raising. Many parents remain unaware of the extent of their influence on their children's motivation and aspirations and are unprepared or unable to use that influence effectively. While parental influence has great potential, its quality will depend on the parent's access to and understanding of the school's objectives, and the sense of competence and hope with which parents approach the task. Some schools are sponsoring discussion groups for parents to promote their role in helping them become more effective.

Many parents unaware of their influence and how to use it

Schools have an important function both in informing parents about college and career options and in encouraging them to hold high expectations for their children's academic success. As we have emphasized, the primary focus of the counselor's role should be to enhance the academic performance of students and assist them in making choices that will widen their options. An important aspect of doing this will be to encourage the family support system that is essential for the fulfillment of each student's potential. Each school, therefore, should develop a specific program of information and support for parents. We believe that this should begin at the elementary level and continue through the senior year of high school. The goals of such a program should be:

- To encourage parents to view college as realistic and achievable, and to help them transmit this perception to their children.
- To share with parents information concerning the student's academic progress and potential for further education.
- To help parents understand the curricular options, consequences of various academic choices, graduation requirements, procedures, and vocabulary of the school.

- To provide parents with accurate information regarding college opportunities and financing.

Designing such a program requires a sensitivity to and awareness of the needs of parents. Active encouragement and outreach may be required. Some parents may be reluctant to participate because of their own negative experiences in school or feelings of incompetence; others may feel overwhelmed by economic and work pressures or the stresses involved in single parenting.

The need for information and support is especially great in those families in which the children are the first to attend college. Schools should make every effort to provide information for parents at times and in places that are convenient to busy work and family schedules. It is also imperative to translate this information into the native languages of parents served by the school. We have learned of a number of strategies that schools use to give parents the message that their participation is valued. For example, counselors arrange to make phone calls to parents in the evening, and variable work schedules are arranged so that counselors may be available for late afternoon or evening consultation at school or in a neighborhood club or community agency.

Counseling must fit parents' work schedules

As previously mentioned, the use of paraprofessional aides to reach parents who might otherwise consider postsecondary education impossible or impractical is noteworthy. Many schools with few minority and bilingual counselors have trained aides who are culturally attuned to the student and parent population. Not only do these aides provide essential services, but some are encouraged to seek professional training that will increase their responsibilities in the school or community guidance program.

In emphasizing that schools can and should do much more to assist parents, the Commission stresses, too, the valuable contribution parents can make to the schools. Their active support is needed not only to help their own children succeed academically, but also to improve the quality of services in the school for all children. As noted earlier, parents' participation in the school planning process is necessary to identify the range of student needs and assist in the development of a guidance and counseling program that addresses those needs.

4. Provide a program of guidance and counseling during the early and middle years of schooling, especially for students who traditionally have not been well-served by the schools.

Providing Guidance and Support for Children and Young Adolescents

From an early age all students need help developing the full range of their talents and interests, building their self-esteem, and overcoming blocks to learning. Guidance and counseling programs for children at the elementary, middle, and junior high school levels should be directed toward creating the groundwork and family-school support system that will enable students to keep alive a full range of postsecondary options. Our interest here is in helping young children achieve early success, not in providing earlier pressure for college entrance.

A growing proportion of students are entering school with unmet physical and emotional needs that interfere with their ability to concentrate and learn. Children who are hungry, sick, or worried about their family life cannot possibly do as well in school as students who are relatively free from those stresses. Yet, in many school systems, counseling services at the elementary level are limited or nonexistent. Teachers who do their best to fill the gap are overworked and frustrated.

The organization of the elementary school allows for some counseling functions to be carried out by teachers. But teachers cannot do it all. This is particularly true where the growing rate of child poverty and changing demographics mandate increased attention, support, and encouragement of children at an early age. The primary responsibility of elementary school teachers is to develop those skills that enhance learning and a sense of well-being. They can provide elements of counseling support as part of the major task of teaching, but many children require more than a teacher can reasonably be expected to offer.

More help required than teachers can offer alone

Counselors working as part of a team with teachers offer the most promising delivery system for elementary guidance and support. Where the Commission encountered elementary counseling programs, teachers were enthusiastic about the efficacy of early intervention strategies and the help counselors offer students, teachers, and parents. Specifically we recommend that elementary school counselors engage in the following kinds of activities:

- Helping diagnose strengths, weaknesses, and potential of students.
- Assisting teachers in developing a classroom environment supportive of the learning style of every student and in analyzing needs for remediation.
- Working directly with small groups of students who need help dealing

with particularly difficult problems of school adjustment and performance.

- Maintaining regular contact with parents, both individually and in larger meetings.
- Making referrals to and working with outside agencies to serve the needs of children and parents that cannot be met by the school.
- Working closely with teachers to design and lead exercises that help students develop self-esteem, learn how to identify and express feelings appropriately, develop satisfying peer relationships, and make decisions.

As students move into middle school and junior high school they generally encounter a very different organizational structure, including a departmentalized curriculum and course offerings at various levels of difficulty. In addition to the kinds of activities listed above, as early as sixth or seventh grade, counselors need to help students understand which courses will prepare them for college and encourage them to plan a program of study that keeps their options open for postsecondary education. A similar focus is needed as students move into high school. Students, especially those who are not receiving help in academic program planning at home, need the opportunity to talk with a counselor about appropriate course selection at both of these crucial transition points. As obvious as this appears, we have found that many students have little or no access to counselors at these important times.

Information about college needed before high school

Students from low-income families, rural as well as urban, are less likely than their more fortunate peers to have access to guidance counseling in considering the important decisions they are required to make as they move into high school. Moreover, students who lack access to counseling are more likely to be placed in non-academic curricular tracks and take fewer academic courses. Thus it appears that students who may need guidance the most are least likely to receive it in their schools. We believe that this situation must be reversed.

Counseling for early adolescents also should include specific information about college and financial aid opportunities that traditionally are left until the junior or senior year of high school. This information should be shared with both students and their parents, with increasing levels of specificity regarding the application process for both college admission and financing, as students proceed into and through high school.

When crucial choices about courses are made, it is important for students and parents to believe that college is a real possibility, financially as well as academically. Without such information, young adolescents are likely to make educational choices that limit rather than advance their academic aspirations. Indeed, the schools have responsibility for helping develop those aspirations, rather than just recognizing them when they emerge among some students.

Students and parents must believe college is a *real* possibility

Early adolescence is a special time, a time when marked physical and emotional changes can create problems for young people as they reach toward adulthood while clinging in many ways to childhood. For some youth it is a time when abuses of their advancing adult capacities too easily disrupt their

lives. Teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, and entanglements with delinquency cut across school-based learning and frequently defeat it. More than counseling is needed to deal with such issues, but good counseling is a fundamental element in working with them. Yet the middle schools and junior high schools that these early adolescents attend have fewer guidance and counseling services than high schools.

A district-wide guidance and counseling plan—from kindergarten through twelfth grade—provides a basis for targeting assistance to students at each educational level within the overall needs and resources of the district. The Commission recognizes that adding counseling services at the early and middle levels of schooling might place a fiscal strain on some school districts. But we must call attention to the convincing evidence from our dialogues and studies of the importance of early intervention and support, particularly for students who traditionally have not been well served by the schools. State initiatives may be required to ensure that the school systems that most need such services have the resources to afford them.

Enhancing Action In the Schools

While the major actions we propose must take place at the school level, the successful implementation of these recommendations will require the involvement of a variety of other actors and institutions, as well as a commitment of support from the state and federal governments. The waste of human potential that is indicated by the discouraging dropout rate and the declining college enrollment of black and economically disadvantaged youth is not an issue to be dealt with just by the schools. It is a societal problem that will require a major commitment of public and private resources.

We make four recommendations in this area. Three address the need for a commitment of support and a collaboration of resources at the community, state, and federal levels; the fourth calls upon those responsible for the preparation and professional development of counselors to revise training programs to include the skills and knowledge counselors and others will need to carry out the model of precollege guidance and counseling we propose.

5. Strengthen collaboration among schools, community agencies, colleges, businesses, and other community resources to enhance services available to students.

Better Services Through Collaboration

The school planning process we have proposed here creates a vehicle for determining the types of guidance and counseling needed by various students in the school and for assessing the available resources that can be brought to bear in meeting those needs. While we recognize the difficulties in developing collaborative programs, we believe that the search for resources must extend well beyond the school building. We urge schools to make efforts to identify and build bridges to resources in the community. In a country as vast as the United States, variation in the availability and quality of community resources is a fact: Some schools, school districts, and communities simply have access to greater resources than others. This divergence is somewhat, but not entirely, dependent on the size, wealth, and geographic location of the community. Unfortunately, poor districts—rural as well as urban—in which schools most need additional resources are likely to be ones in which the community itself has few to offer.

Isolated rural towns, for example, often are less able to provide the variety of human service agencies found in an urban area; there may be no local college and local businesses may be struggling to survive. In such communities, no matter how great the desire to institute school-community collaboration, the possibilities are limited. The crucial role that state and federal government should play in mitigating the effects of such inequalities is discussed later.

We have found, however, that there are some resources to be discovered even in the "poorest" communities. Students find important sources of encouragement and guidance in their churches, or in such local organizations as the Boys or Girls Clubs. When schools recognize and work effectively with such "informal counselors," students experience the kind of support that can help them make choices and decisions that will enrich rather than diminish their lives. In fact, no matter what the wealth of the community, the challenge for the schools is to build a support system for their students that utilizes the key institutions, organizations, and individuals in the larger community.

The central question in finding and assessing available resources is whether they will indeed be helpful in providing for the essential needs of students outlined in the planning process. While these needs vary, as does the capacity of different schools and communities to address them, we have found two major areas in which collaborative approaches appear to make a significant difference in the services available to students.

Emotional and Physical Needs of Students

As the social institutions with by far the most contact with children and adolescents, schools are the best place for the early identification of physical and emotional needs and problems, before they become serious blocks to learning and more difficult to address. The list of problems that create barriers to learning is long, and includes poor health and malnutrition, psychological stress resulting from unstable family situations, drug and alcohol abuse, depression and suicide, and pregnancy and early parenting.

Schools cannot divorce themselves from such issues. At the same time, they cannot and should not be responsible for the total well-being of children and families. During the Commission's dialogues and visits to selected schools, we were advised of collaborations with human service agencies that provide for emotional, physical, and social needs of students beyond what schools can or should provide. These increased coordination and collaboration efforts between the schools and the social service and youth-serving agencies in the local community can help to insure essential services to students and their families without overburdening the school.

When school professional staff cannot provide the kind of long-term therapeutic intervention that may be required, they refer students to a local counseling center or social service agency with whom the school has developed a working relationship. This is the most common and modest form of collaboration. Community agencies are also being brought into schools both to provide services directly to students and to act as consultants to staff. We encountered the following range of services being offered:

Removing blocks to learning not a job for schools alone

- In-service workshops and technical assistance on dealing with such issues as drug abuse or pregnancy.
- Peer support programs in which students are supervised and coordinated by a community agency.
- One-on-one counseling, as well as group sessions and workshops for students.

Although we are encouraged by these examples, we are also aware of the difficulties of building bridges between schools and human service agencies. Logistical considerations as well as more basic issues of trust and differing views of professional roles contribute to these difficulties. We believe, however, that more can and should be done. Again, a school planning process that brings together the sense of commitment, resources, and appropriate people—counselors, teachers, parents, and representatives from human service agencies—can facilitate new and stronger forms of collaboration.

Easing the Transition To Postsecondary Opportunities

Existing school counseling services tend to focus on students who are at either end of the spectrum of school success. But many students are neither

outstanding academically nor potential dropouts. They are described as "average students" who need sustained encouragement to work hard in school and help in overcoming the societal and personal barriers to pursuing postsecondary opportunities. Students, especially those from families and communities in which few people attend college and a significant number are unemployed, may not know how to think carefully about or plan for their lives after high school. A key problem for these students is the absence of a network of adults or peers with first-hand experience and contacts in the college, business, and professional worlds.

Many model programs are being developed for helping such students. These programs are supported by colleges, corporations, and other community institutions such as public libraries, foundations, and even by individual benefactors. They range from relatively simple efforts to make up-to-date information more accessible to students and families to more extensive collaborations providing a multiplicity of college and career advising and counseling services to students. Most involve some or all of the following services described in the next five paragraphs.

Community agencies help disadvantaged students plan for college

Information on and assistance in gaining admission to college and securing necessary financial aid. Some schools make use of district funds and corporate donations to set up their own college and career centers, where students (and parents) investigate printed and computerized information and audiovisual presentations. In other communities we found examples of colleges and libraries that offer extensive information and guidance services.

Help in securing employment and thinking about careers. A number of programs sponsored by colleges, businesses, and foundations offer students summer jobs and/or part-time work during their junior and senior years of high school. In some instances, the summer experience involves academic enrichment as well. We have also learned about programs that offer in-school workshops for students, starting as early as the ninth grade to encourage them to plan ahead for colleges and careers, and include presentations by speakers representing a range of careers.

Mentorships. An increasing number of school-community collaborations include mentorship as a key component. Individual students are matched with adult volunteers from all walks of life, including the business and academic communities, who will serve as advisors, counselors, and role models. In some programs, mentors invite their students to participate in cultural and other activities outside of the school, or host visits of students to their workplaces. A number of programs make use of peers as mentors, i.e. college students become advisors for high school students or serve as big brothers/big sisters for college freshmen.

Assistance in making the adjustment to college. Students, especially those who are the first in their family to attend college, simply do not know what to expect from college. Promising programs have been developed in which college admissions counselors and teachers, as well as students attending college, come to high schools for group sessions to help college-bound students

anticipate what it is like to leave home, live with someone other than a family member, engage in a wider range of independent study, and generally assume greater responsibility for their own behavior and academic achievement. Some colleges also offer summer academic enrichment workshops, courses, and institutes that help students strengthen their academic preparation for college.

Direct grants. In several cities, collaborative programs are able to offer scholarships to selected students, based on need and academic potential.

Although we did not conduct a comprehensive survey of such collaborations, we became aware of numerous different programs. Each offers its own unique combination of various types of public and private sources of support and types of services. For example, the Cleveland Scholarship Programs, Inc., is supported by local corporations, private foundations, and individual contributions, and provides nearly all of the service elements listed above. The Higher Education Information Center in Massachusetts is able to provide students and families with access to extensive sources of information from its base in the Boston Public Library and also conducts vigorous outreach in such diverse settings as schools, labor unions, churches, and community centers. APEX, a broad partnership involving school districts in southern Arizona, the University of Arizona, and local business and professional people who serve primarily as mentors, provides students with opportunities to attend college courses while still in high school and a chance to learn about a range of careers through field trips and associations with their

Incentive for achievement enhanced by academic support and guidance

Perhaps the most dramatic example of direct financial aid and support from private benefactors working collaboratively with schools is to be found in the program initiated by Eugene Lang, a New York City businessman, who offered to pay the college costs for a group of East Harlem sixth-graders if they proceeded satisfactorily through high school graduation. In addition to the promise of financial support, he has provided counseling and tutoring services to sustain the students' interest in school and has himself functioned as a mentor to them.* The Commission notes in this initiative, which is now being extended by others to comparable neighborhood schools, many of the elements essential for success in precollege guidance and counseling. Not only are students and their parents presented with a real incentive for school achievement, but they are provided with comprehensive academic support and guidance, both in and out of school.

*Mr. Lang's staff reports that despite a school dropout rate as high as 75 percent in this neighborhood, virtually all of the students who still reside in New York are completing high school and planning to pursue postsecondary education.

6. Establish a process in each state to determine the guidance and counseling needs of specific student populations and give support to local initiatives that address these needs.

Supporting Local Initiatives: The State Role

The widespread state initiatives in education reform between 1980 and 1986 have tended to ignore guidance and counseling, although some states have included it in their agenda for reform. We think that this lack of interest shortchanges children and youth, especially in light of the impact of new statewide academic standards on low-achieving students. Support for guidance and counseling services, in most places, will have to come from state as well as local funds, with increases in such support most likely coming from the state. In addition, the leadership role of the state allows state policymakers to suggest items for the local agenda that might not otherwise appear. States also may consider issues of overall equity that local schools cannot address.

The Commission believes that a new imperative will have to be established to support guidance and counseling at the state level. We suggest the creation of a statewide task force as one means to that end. Whether a state chooses to establish such a task force, however, we recommend that responsible state authorities undertake the following responsibilities:

State leadership can help set local agenda

- Analysis of the distribution and needs of "underserved" students throughout the state, with emphasis upon their counseling needs within the context of school reform in the state.
- Specific plans for funding to meet the counseling and guidance needs of such students with a fair basis for sharing costs by local school boards and the state.
- Development of cooperation between school and other major social service agencies serving children and families in order to encourage such cooperation at local levels.
- State financial incentives for innovative programs of precollege counseling and guidance (i.e., the use of aides to assist counselors and technology to provide information about colleges and college costs).
- Review of school-based plans for counseling and guidance, and dissemination of particularly interesting plans.
- Recommendations for revision of certification for counselors.
- State support for the planning we have suggested at the local school level.
- The development of outcome indicators to help assess on a statewide basis the effects of substantial new efforts in counseling and guidance.

- Recommendations to school districts about developing better articulation of guidance services among elementary, middle, secondary, and postsecondary education.
- Development of a state-level policy on staffing of school guidance programs, based on the discussion of that subject in this report.
- Suggestions to local schools for enlisting the cooperation of business groups and specific businesses in developing both improved counseling service and mentor programs for youth. (This aspect of the state's exploration might well include an effort to coordinate state-level thinking about advising youth with state plans for future economic development based on educational improvement.)

By paying attention to such issues, state authorities will begin to move guidance and counseling into the mainstream of state education reform—where it belongs. The membership and sponsorship of the group or task force that takes on the initiatives listed above will be significant in achieving that result. Membership of such a group should be broad and include counselors, school administrators, business and political leaders, state education officials, and representative citizens. In addition it will be important to include representatives from major social service agencies outside the schools, and high school and college youth. We lean toward sponsorship by the governor of the state, but recognize that there are states where the governor will want the state education department to assume the role of creating a task force.

States should serve, not inhibit, local school options

The current school reform movement is characterized by a major shift of responsibility for educational change from the national and local levels to the state level. This shift has been accompanied by increases in the proportion of state funding for schools in a number of states, and it has included the imposition of numerous new requirements on schools by state authority, frequently through action by governors or state legislatures rather than by state education officials. The Commission aligns itself with another theme of the school reform movement—the importance of freeing individual schools for more school-based changes to improve learning. Thus we believe that while states have an important role in developing counseling and guidance services in schools, the role should be one of service to the local school district rather than control of it. State initiatives should avoid detailed prescriptions that inhibit local options. The kind of guidance and counseling services for children and youth that we foresee can emerge only if a local school enlists its parents, teachers, counselors, and principal to plan those services and, in the process, become committed to them.

Finally, we strongly suggest to state authorities that they consider the issue of how to provide sufficient resources to pay for improvements recommended in the field of counseling and guidance. In more than a few states, school reform legislation has imposed new learning requirements without providing the means of achieving them, particularly for disadvantaged children and youth. The result is more school failure and dropouts among young people needing help to meet new requirements. This negative aspect of school reform should be avoided in state-level efforts to improve guidance and counseling.

Imposing new academic standards requires support to achieve them

7. Increase support of federal programs that help disadvantaged students to enter and remain in college.

Continuing the Commitment to Equity: The Federal Role

The federal government must do more than cheering on the states if equal educational opportunity is to maintain any meaning as a national goal. There is immense variation among states, both in their capacity and political will to serve the growing proportion of young people from minority and poverty backgrounds. College attendance should not be an opportunity hemmed in by state boundaries. While restricting students to their state institutions may save federal dollars, it reduces the college options of the poor in a manner that is not consistent with the American commitment to equal educational opportunity.

First, it is essential that the federal government continue to support student grant and loan programs that assist disadvantaged students in entering and remaining in college. The shift from grants to loans, and the threats of overall reductions in aid adversely and disproportionately affect the college-going and college-completion rates among economically disadvantaged and minority students.

In addition, there are several smaller scale federal programs that contribute to disadvantaged students going to college, and they should receive support. Since 1966, the Talent Search Program has maintained projects throughout the United States to help disadvantaged youth understand the value of postsecondary education and gain admission to college. Talent Search serves to supplement the limited precollege guidance and counseling services frequently found in schools attended by the children of low-income families.

In the Education Amendments of 1980 the program was specifically authorized to provide assistance to clients from ages 12 to 29, and it has tended to focus on the earlier years. According to the law, two-thirds of its clients must be from low-income families in which the parents have not attended college. We have not examined Talent Search in depth, but another College Board study has done so.* Based on that work, we support the continuation and expansion of the program.

The Equal Opportunity Centers (EOC) were started by 1972 federal legislation that recognized the growing number of people aspiring to college from all age levels, particularly those making the transition to college after some years of work. Mandated in the 1980 legislation to serve clients 19 years of age or older, the EOC's augment Talent Search activities in important ways. Their value is underlined in the previously mentioned study along with specific suggestions for their improvement. We support those viewpoints and the recommendations that accompany them. At the present time

*Paul Franklin, *Helping Disadvantaged Youth and Adults Enter College: An Assessment of Two Federal Programs*, The College Board, 1985.

Talent Search and EOC together help place about 20 percent of the minority students enrolling as freshmen in college. They could and should be funded to do more.

Two other small federal programs, Upward Bound and Special Programs for Students from Disadvantaged Backgrounds, have been active for many years. Our numerous contacts with students indicate that these programs are significant in the lives of some youngsters in preparing them for a successful transition to postsecondary education. It is important to note that the present administration budget plans for these programs in fiscal 1987 reduces them by more than 50 percent.

We are aware that some evaluations of Upward Bound have suggested that it may be more significant in building positive attitudes and confidence among potential college students than in changing their levels of academic performance. Yet, students participating in these programs consistently report that the academic support and counseling they received in the program have helped them immeasurably in preparing for college. Their only complaint was that the program accommodated too few students, several participants noting that they were admitted on the basis of a single examination that excluded a large number of others of comparable ability who could have profited from the program.

New legislation needed

Our Commission supports the concept of a new title in the Higher Education Act to pull together all of these small programs and to add elements of cooperation between schools and colleges to mount early information-sharing and intervention projects that encourage college-going. Such a piece of legislation would recognize the increasingly important national issue of providing the trained work force needed to sustain the nation's economy. This is an issue that dominates much of the recent school reform literature, but it has yet to spark support for strengthening precollege guidance and counseling. If new federal legislation were possible in this realm, it should include incentives for states to engage in recruitment and training of counselors, especially from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds. It also should provide funds, perhaps on a matching basis, for local mentoring programs that would serve the dual purpose of giving students access to additional adult support and attracting young people into counseling careers.

8. Revise the training of school counselors to include the specific skills and knowledge necessary to enable them to take a more central role in schools.

Preparing Counselors for a Central Role in Schools

The preservice training of counselors has a direct bearing on how effective counselors will be in instituting and carrying out the model of precollege guidance and counseling that we have proposed. If counselors are to have an impact on the climate of the school, as well as on the prospects and perspectives of individual students, they will need a broad repertoire of competencies, intervention methods, and strategies. The effectiveness of counselors will also depend upon the depth of their understanding of the needs of a diverse student population and of the schools as institutions—the way schools operate and the nature of the counselor's role within them. They will require, in addition, a sense of the complexities of building collaboration among the many agencies serving children and youth.

Relatively few graduate programs in guidance and counseling encompass this training agenda. In fact, many counselor preparation programs do not even offer specific training for school counselors; of the 407 institutions offering counselor education at the master's level, only 239 provide certification programs or graduate degrees in school counseling. Overall, the number of courses focusing on the school-based aspects of counseling has decreased; instead, courses and internships reinforce general counseling skills applicable to a variety of different settings, including many outside of schools.

Clinical training not enough for school setting

Many of these skills are indeed important and useful to school counselors. As enablers of personal growth, school counselors need a solid grounding in psychology and developmental theory and practice. They need to be able to foster student attitudes of self-confidence and competence, and to help students expand their educational opportunities, academic achievement, and ability to plan and make appropriate choices. The clinical focus of many counselor education programs, however, does not prepare counselors to utilize these skills effectively in the school setting.

Specifically, the Commission believes that counselor preparation programs should offer training that prepares school counselors to:

- Understand the general characteristics of the national school and college population—age, sex, race/ethnicity, and retention data; and specifically how to construct state, local, and school profiles.

- Understand the current realities of financial aid and college admissions:
  –the way enrollment is distributed nationally
  –the characteristics of colleges to which their students are likely to go and those of colleges to which students could be encouraged to aspire
  –admissions requirements, procedures, and calendars

–financial aid application procedures and calendars
–testing calendars and costs.

- Understand the world of work and career opportunities.
- Work effectively with all of the populations of students and families to be served, particularly when students come from ethnic and cultural backgrounds different from that of the counselor.
- Engage in academic program planning with students in order to help them meet school graduation requirements and college admissions standards.
- Advise and counsel students in groups, both in the classroom and in special settings.
- Reach out to parents and enlist their help and support in preparing students for new challenges and options.
- Work with younger students and their parents to introduce and familiarize them with high school and college.
- Train and supervise aides and other paraprofessionals.
- Use computers to gather information about financial aid, college admissions, and other specific materials important to helping students get to college.
- Design approaches and strategies for dropout prevention and recovery.
- Build cooperative relationships with community agencies, businesses, and colleges.
- Evaluate the overall effectiveness of a counseling program.

Include critical competencies in certification of counselors

The Commission recognizes that certification processes and requirements are important factors in shaping counselor education program content and expectations of the school counselor's role. We recommend that competencies such as those listed above are critical to the improvement of precollege guidance and counseling, and that they be included in both state certification standards and counselor education accreditation standards.

The teaching of such competencies could occur through new courses or be integrated into the existing curriculum. One approach would be to develop a series of learning modules, consisting both of printed and audiovisual materials, which are designed to deal with topics such as those outlined here. Such materials may be prepared by the College Board and others in collaboration with associations of professional counselors and counselor educators.

The internship required in most counselor training programs is as important as the specific course offerings in preparing prospective school counselors. Certainly it is important that precollege counselors have the opportunity to learn about the environment in which they will be working by interning in school settings. However, while many voices in the counseling profession are calling for a new role for counselors, there are still relatively few schools that provide the models needed for training programs.

Perhaps the internship period could be divided into a number of short-term experiences in a variety of school and community settings. Through such experiences, interns could begin to develop and practice a broad repertoire of skills and strategies that they will then be able to incorporate into their work as precollege counselors. Places such as financial aid offices and college-level academic support programs could be included.

The Commission recognizes that much of the focus recommended for preservice training is also important for in-service training. Continuing professional development is crucial to helping the current generation of guidance counselors deal more effectively with the changing demands being made on them. Many school counselors today were trained 15 to 20 years ago under the National Defense Education Act (NDEA). They, along with teachers and administrators of the same generation, need assistance in serving a school population that is increasingly diverse. Their repertoire must include new strategies, as well as increased knowledge about the schools—the way they operate, and the appropriate functions of guidance and counseling within them.

We recognize that moving into the role we envisage for counselors—one that involves different functions and is collaborative in nature—is not easy. Counselors trained to work in schools as part of a team of educators and community service professionals will encounter experienced colleagues committed to an earlier model of guidance and counseling. Change will take time, placing an added burden on those within the schools seeking to incorporate our recommendations. It requires an in-service professional development program that not only fills gaps in training, but effects changes in the ways that teachers, counselors, and administrators will function in the schools.

Conclusion

In concluding our inquiry into the nature and condition of precollege guidance and counseling in this country, the Commission wishes to emphasize again that those services frequently thought of as peripheral to the education of young people can make a significant difference in helping them fulfill their potential. Well-planned programs for adult support for children and youth—engaging resources both in and outside the schools—can expand educational success, particularly for those students we have identified as underserved. All students can be assisted to become effective learners, to gain and maintain confidence in their capacities, and to make choices and decisions crucial to their well-being, as well as that of society.

This is a particularly important time for the federal government to renew its 20-year-old commitment to equal opportunity for all students and at all levels of education. That commitment has improved the educational chances of millions of young people, yet it is now on the wane. High dropout rates, especially among Hispanics, substantial declines in college-going by blacks, a reduction in real dollars available to students to pay rising tuitions, and a shift to a higher proportion of loans in student support packages are only a few of the indicators of the eroding federal commitment.

Commitment necessary for successful programs of precollege guidance and counseling

Our conception of precollege guidance and counseling as educational functions places the services they encompass in the mainstream of American schooling. Guidance and counseling functions should have a share of federal, state, and local funding that reflects their mainstream position. This may require a commitment of new resources. We want to emphasize that we are not recommending a transfer of funds from one program that children need to another. A reallocation of support from remedial education to guidance and counseling clearly is not acceptable. Those initiating programs of educational reform must recognize that in the interest of justice and equity for all students, higher standards of performance can be achieved only by mutually supportive systems of instruction and guidance.

We believe, too, that the differences among our institutions, and the populations they serve, do not negate the responsibility of developing a climate in each school that enables young people to assume growing responsibility for their own education and for the decisions they must learn to make concerning their future lives. Toward this end, teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents must assist students in a manner that allows them to become active participants in fashioning educational success. Young people will not be helped by either guidance or instruction that views them as mere receptacles for information. They need to know why they are learning and where learning can lead.

Finally, we do not imply that "all students should go to college," but rather that all young people should be guided and educated in a manner that assumes this possibility. No one should be denied an education that enlarges opportunity, and this requires that the actions taken at all levels of schooling support the active involvement of those whose futures are at stake. This is the full intent of "Keeping the Options Open."

Appendix

Synopsis of:

Keeping the Options Open: An Overview

Interim Report of
The Commission on Precollege Guidance and Counseling
January 1986

Preface

Although a major function of schools is to assist students in making appropriate choices and decisions about postsecondary education and training, precollege guidance and counseling was ignored, or mentioned only tangentially, in the many recent reports about American education. To fill this gap, the Trustees of the College Board, in September 1984, appointed a 21-member Commission on Precollege Guidance and Counseling. During its two-year term the Commission is to review the evolution of the process of precollege guidance and counseling, assess its current condition, render some judgments about future needs, and make recommendations to improve its quality and increase its availability—especially for those who have had limited access to postsecondary education.

At its first meeting in October 1984, the Commission agreed to begin work by moving on two fronts. The first was a series of "dialogues" to be held throughout the United States to acquaint Commission members with the condition of guidance and counseling as currently practiced in schools, and as perceived by a cross section of counselors, teachers, students, school principals, admissions officers, parents, community representatives, and others. The second was the preparation of particular studies by the Commission staff and others on various aspects of counseling and guidance.

The Commission is now midway through its two-year investigation. The document it will present in October 1986 at the College Board's National Forum in New York will constitute its final report with recommendations. The interim report does not include recommendations; although some may be inferred from it. Our major purpose is to share what the Commission learned and to solicit additional observations and comments prior to making recommendations.

We decided to consider the needs of students for guidance and counseling services from elementary school through high school, and to assess a range of sources that provide guidance and counseling service to young people rather than to view guidance counselors as the sole source of those services.

This synopsis was prepared primarily for discussion at the 1986 regional meetings of the College Board.

At the end of its first year, the Commission is left with the broad impression that there is a considerable waste of human talent as a result of the ways our schools are now operated, and the further view that guidance and counseling can contribute significantly to reducing that waste. There are youngsters dropping out of school who would make good college candidates; there are young people failing to learn not because of lack of ability but because of lack of encouragement and support; there are preventable tragedies in thousands of young lives.

Introduction

Long before students start thinking about going to college, their success in academic learning, and their accompanying emotional and social development combine to influence their choices and opportunities for higher education. Schools at every level, therefore, have a special role, along with students' families, in moving youngsters toward the full realization of the qualities important for success in postsecondary education.

A singular aspect of the vast movement of Americans into higher education is that it comes about through the individual decision of each person involved. Most secondary, and some elementary, schools provide guidance and counseling services designed to help students take advantage of the academic offerings of the school and make a successful transition to the next level of education or to a career. Following a long period of expansion of such services, school boards, faced with fiscal constraints, increasingly question the effectiveness and even the necessity of guidance and counseling services. This questioning is occurring at a time when both the personal and societal reasons for attending college are compelling, especially for the increasingly diverse student population in our schools.

A Guide to the Study

The *first section* of the interim report highlights the needs of students from elementary school through high school. The Commission considers how guidance and counseling services help students develop a basic sense of competence and self-worth and sustain the motivation to work hard in school and prepare for college. The Commission also outlines what it has found out about academic choices in school and how they affect decisions about college. The *second section* reviews what the Commission has learned about the current condition of counseling. The lack of priorities among the many roles and responsibilities assigned to school counselors, as well as other problems and possibilities that arise as a result of the many functions performed by school counselors are discussed. The *third section* focuses on the issue of equity. Differential access to counseling in rural, urban, and suburban communities is viewed in light of concern about the perpetuation of disadvantage in the schools and society. The *fourth, and final, section* identifies issues and questions to be used in focusing thought on possible recommendations.

The Process of Investigation

The Commission conducted five dialogues: two in large cities (Washington, D.C. and San Francisco), one each in a small city (Albuquerque) and in a suburban community (near Boston), and one for representatives from rural areas across the United States (in Kansas City). In addition, the Commission sponsored seven meetings with students in New England, North Carolina, Chicago, and Miami. Separate dialogues also were arranged for the Executive Board and staff of the National Association of

College Admissions Counselors and the National Council and staff of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. These meetings followed a common agenda and were structured by the following kinds of questions:

- How do students develop their own concepts of personal competence, learn to assess their own capacities, and set goals for themselves?
- What are the sources in school of student motivation?
- How and when do students find out what is needed to enter college and how do they deal with it?
- What are the problems of student adjustment to college and how can schools and colleges deal with them more successfully?

The information shared by the participants in the dialogues was evaluated together with quantitative data from the National Center for Education Statistics' longitudinal study for 1980 to 1982, *High School and Beyond*. The Educational Testing Service prepared a descriptive study of high school guidance based on data about and response from 30,000 high school sophomores in 1980 and 22,000 of these same students who were seniors in 1982. The Commission also reviewed data on the changing demographics of students in public schools and the changing nature of the American family, as well as high school and college enrollment and retention statistics. These statistics have helped to highlight problems and issues deserving special consideration.

The Needs of Students

Several counselors mentioned the lack of "college consciousness" among their students, and told the Commission the starting point should be to find ways to help many more students view going to college as a possibility. The primary focus of the investigation has been on student needs rather than those of institutions or the counseling profession. We have focused on identifying the range of factors, both inside and outside of school, that affect the likelihood of a student aspiring to and successfully making the transition into college.

The Early Years: Developing a Sense of Competence and Self-Worth

A counselor in Albuquerque summarized the view expressed in many of the Commission dialogues when she said, "Confidence, values, and skills begin at home through parental reinforcement." In urban areas, the Commission heard educators speak of the economic pressures that disrupt family life and leave students in search of "surrogate parents." In suburban communities, students and educators warned us against assuming that young people from more affluent families are getting support and assistance from home. Referring to themselves as "latchkey" children, suburban students told us they relied on television for their images of adult life and work.

The single-parent household, usually headed by the mother, is becoming the new de facto norm for childhood experience. Almost three-fifths of the children born in 1983 will live with only one parent before reaching 18, and many of these young people will grow up in or near poverty. One child in five under age 19, and one child in four under age 6 is poor. Black and Hispanic children living in households headed by females are at the greatest risk of growing up in poverty. In summarizing the effects of demographic trends on the schools, a recent report of the Institute for Educational Leadership described the future population of students as "...a group of children who will be poorer, more ethnically and linguistically diverse, who will have more handicaps that will affect their learning."

The educators who spoke with us emphasized that schools play a major role in helping students learn to assess and believe in their own potential. School remains a central and powerful institution in the lives of children. At school children test what one counselor called "early messages regarding winners and losers," or, as another counselor put it, "where students receive important daily messages about their competence from adults." The challenge for elementary schools is to find new ways to reach out to parents and enlist their assistance in the educational process while also providing more support for children who cannot count on support from home. Teachers and counselors from elementary schools with counseling programs are enthusiastic about the efficacy of early intervention strategies and the help counselors are able to offer students, teachers, and parents.

Young Adolescents: Developing Aspirations and Sustaining Motivation

As students move up through the middle school and the junior high school they enter what one counselor in Albuquerque called "a less personal and more pressured environment." The organization of the school day is more complex, the self-contained classroom is replaced by a departmentalized curriculum, the sorting function of schools becomes more explicit, and courses are offered at different levels of difficulty. In many school systems, students are placed in different curricula or "tracks" offering levels and types of courses that prepare them for different futures.

Administrators, counselors, and teachers who spoke with us agreed with the view expressed by a counselor in San Francisco, that "junior high is crucial; if they do not take proper courses, later alternatives are not open to them." Some students seem to move through their junior high and early high school years, "going through the motions," with little motivation for demanding academic work. They appear to choose their courses with little awareness of the connection between their current academic program and their future goals.

Evidence from the *High School and Beyond* data points to a serious lack of awareness on the part of students of the consequences of their early academic choices. Student expectations regarding college are not necessarily reflected in the curriculum they enter in the ninth grade. Only 46 percent of the students who expected in grade 9 that they would enter college reported being enrolled in the academic curriculum, as opposed to general or vocational, in grade 10. This increased to approximately 52 percent of these students by the time they were seniors. Thus, by their senior year, only about half the students reported being on a path that was congruent with their own college expectations.

Although in some schools the sorting practices allow students to take different courses at different levels, overall it appears that "tracking" has a major effect on the quality of education students receive. Given the important consequences associated with curricula placement, it is indeed disturbing to find so many students with college expectations not engaged in the necessary academic preparation. This raises the question whether guidance and counseling services in junior high schools focus sufficiently on appropriate course selection.

The Commission learned that for some youngsters the transition into junior or senior high school is characterized by a dramatic decline in motivation and performance. In a national policy report, the Hispanic Policy Development Project cited the junior high school years as a particularly important time to work on issues of motivation and aspiration. This research revealed that 43 percent of Hispanic students who drop out leave school before grade 10, and 25 percent of all Hispanic students enter high school overage.

The Commission heard and read suggestions that counseling for early adolescents should include specific information about college and financial aid opportunities that traditionally are left until the junior or senior year of high school. Many persons

pointed out that when crucial choices about courses are made it is important for students to believe that college is a real possibility for them financially and academically.

Juniors and Seniors: From High School to College

While many students may develop college expectations as early as the sixth grade, and some even earlier, the actual process of planning for college occurs during the junior and senior years of high school. Students consistently cited their parents or siblings as the people who are most important in helping them formulate their college plans. At Miami-Dade Community College, a student recalled, "My older brother talked me into continuing my education, and my mother got me interested in nursing as a career."

At several of our dialogues, we were struck by the differences in the process of post-high school planning described by students from middle- and low-income families. Whether black or white, students from middle-class homes with college educated parents mentioned their parents as the central influence on their decisions about college. Students from low-income backgrounds, while acknowledging their parents were generally supportive, tended to mention the influence of a guidance counselor, teacher, extracurricular advisor, or community leader who helped them get into a special program such as Upward Bound, and who gave them information and support regarding college admission and financial aid. The *High School and Beyond* data revealed that the influence of guidance counselors and teachers on students' post-high school plans increased as socioeconomic and parental education levels decreased.

Many students expressed concern about the complexities of the financial aid process. In our meeting with both students and college aid administrators, we learned that the financial aid process may be so cumbersome that it deters students and parents. The result appears to be that those who need the aid the most are the last to apply or complete the forms.

Students also need information about adjusting to college. Moving from school-to-college is a difficult transition for many students, regardless of background. Participants in the dialogues mentioned particularly the need to manage time and unfamiliar class schedules, and the desire to live up to new assumptions about their independence and maturity as they enter college.

Participants were divided on the issue of who is responsible for helping students make the school-to-college transition. Some participants agreed with the counselor in Washington who maintained that: "Students are not helped enough to understand the myriad of adjustments at the college level." Others suggested that because adjustment to difficulties is related primarily to financing college and to students' lack of academic preparation, the solution rests in more freshman counseling, academic assistance, and tutoring at the college level.

Students themselves offered a number of ideas about ways to ease the transition to college. Their suggestions were markedly similar to those resulting from the meeting with the Executive Board and staff of the National Association of College Admissions Counselors. Both groups believe that information provided by high school counselors should be supplemented by opportunities to speak directly with college students and to visit college campuses.

The Conditions of Counseling

In the past decade of financial constraint, school boards have viewed guidance and counseling as one of the more expendable items. Also, the school reform movement,

which returned education to the national agenda, has not increased attention to or support for guidance and counseling. These functions are not being perceived as central either to the problems or to the possible improvements of schooling.

The Many Roles and Functions of Counselors

The range of counselor responsibilities and functions vary not only among school districts but among schools in the same district. The school principal is predominant in determining the daily routine of counselors and, while citing the support their principals provided them, many counselors bemoaned the plethora of administrative tasks they are called upon to perform. Without standard position descriptions, counselors "fill vacuums" with the result that counselors are expected to do "too much for too many."

The Commission compiled an extensive, but not an exhaustive, list of responsibilities assigned to counselors. These include: class scheduling and assigning students to courses; monitoring attendance; administering and interpreting tests; participating in and managing procedures for special education placements; assisting students in the college application and financial aid process; providing career information and guidance; working with and sometimes disciplining students with behavior problems; dealing with personal issues and crises such as substance abuse and pregnancy; acting as liaison between the school and other social agencies serving students; and communicating with parents on a wide range of subjects.

The concept of the schools dealing with social problems of students and their families runs counter to the prevailing view that schools have taken on too many social issues and should focus their resources more on academic affairs. If the programs and services created in the 1970s to deal with the social problems of youth are cut back, counselors may find themselves with more responsibilities, or, paradoxically, counseling itself may be cut.

If more students are to be given a reasonable chance to fulfill their potential, counselors need to be able to spend time on activities that guide students toward improved self-understanding, better use of their academic talents, and increased knowledge of the options available to them. Academic programming and college counseling remain core functions of guidance counselors.

Problems and Possibilities

In commenting on ways to improve the delivery of guidance and counseling services, many counselors emphasized the difficulty of doing the job well with current student-to-counselor ratios. In some urban areas, as many as 600 to 700 students are assigned to a single counselor; some schools in rural districts have traveling counselors who work in several schools; and some schools do not have counselors at all. Data suggest that between 1959 and 1968 the number of counselors tripled and the student-counselor ratio was halved; and between 1968 and 1979 there were continuing decreases in the student-counselor ratio. However, despite differences among states, it appears that average student-counselor ratios are now increasing.

Overall, the Commission is inclined to believe there is little political support for increasing the number of counselors in schools. Since many of the outcomes of guidance and counseling programs are not easily quantified, it is difficult to demonstrate success or to show the risks to students if they do not receive the benefits of the programs. A counselor in Massachusetts commented, "Counselors work hard, but is it perceived?"

A school administrator from California cited a number of reasons why his school system in the face of financial imperatives eliminated counseling services. He mentioned "...the perception that counseling does not matter...a perceived lack of ac-

countability...a lack of clear priorities and directions in addressing the many counseling needs of kids." That school district is now seeking to determine what services should be restored.

Some schools have tried to add to their counseling capacity through increased coordination with community social service agencies. In some instances community agency personnel have been invited into the schools to serve students directly and to act as consultants to the staff. While generally positive about such actions, we sense that school counseling professionals do not believe these programs will relieve them of current responsibilities.

Counselors are aware that many administrators and faculty believe they act "too much like therapists," and deem the criticism unfair. Counselors contend they are—and should be—responsible for helping students cope with personal and social problems that create barriers to learning. Many counselors are cautious about referring students to programs or services outside of school. They are worried about resistance from students and parents who may conclude professional counseling is unnecessary or unaffordable. Counselors also are concerned about the quality of the help the students receive as well as the time demands created by the need to coordinate with an outside agency.

Some school systems are trying to maintain or increase counseling services by relying more on paraprofessional aides, asking teachers to share advising tasks, and purchasing technological resources. Counselors and students from urban and suburban schools mentioned the availability of computerized information systems operated by students to obtain current information about college and careers. The increased use of paraprofessionals, teachers, or computers could threaten some counselors. On the one hand, "there is a need to reevaluate and redeploy staff more creatively and productively." On the other hand, there is a concern that school systems will use technological innovation as a first step toward replacing professional staff with a fragmented array of less expensive and less adequate services.

Counselors are faced with the challenge of making their work load more reasonable while improving services to students. Counselors and their professional organizations are being urged by colleagues "to seize the initiative," to "redesign the model," and "to create a new strategy for counseling." If more administrative and technical functions were handled by others, counselors would have the opportunity to move into the center of the educational process and make demonstrable and unique contributions toward improving student academic performance. Counselors might adopt as their motto for students the title of this paper, "Keeping the Options Open."

The Preparation and Certification of Counselors

The Commission has become aware that many counselor preparation programs no longer specifically train school counselors. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 gave major impetus to the preparation of school counselors, which continued through the 1960s and into the early 1970s. Currently, of more than 400 counselor education programs at the masters' level or beyond, there are fewer than 250 that provide certificate or graduate degree programs in school counseling. Because state certification programs vary and professional association standards for counselor preparation are applied differentially, the training of school counselors from institution to institution is not standardized.

To some extent the more therapeutic orientation of counselor preparation programs in the past decade has improved the status of counseling. However, it also has contributed to the "stepping-stone phenomenon" of people leaving school counselor positions for private practice as therapists.

Counselors mentioned specific gaps in their preservice education such as: train-

ing in special education requirements; working with parents; dealing with special populations of students, particularly minority and bilingual; working more effectively with groups rather than principally with individuals; using computers to gather information about admission, financial aid, and other specific material important to helping students get to college; and developing increased awareness of the world of work and careers.

Apart from meetings of the National Association of College Admissions Counselors, professional organization meetings usually do not include topics related to choosing or planning for college. This omission is important because attending professional association meetings has been found to be a major source of continuing education for many counselors.

Counselors suggested that in-service education could fill some of the gaps in their preparation programs. In particular, counselors believe they would benefit from some of the following in-service programs: information about the enrollment patterns of minority students in higher education, with strategies for encouraging these students to continue their education; development of skills to involve parents in the educational process of their children; current information about career planning and the range of postsecondary school opportunities; and development of strategies to forge partnerships with community agencies, businesses, and universities. Group counseling techniques were also identified as essential.

The Issue of Equity

Student access to counselors depends on a complex set of factors including size and location of the school, the demographics of the student population, the resources of the school, and the expectations of the community. Too many students with limited access to school counselors also do not have other sources of support available to them. The broad purposes of guidance and counseling in schools have much in common with those of constructive family life as well as those of churches and community agencies.

Access to Counselors: Rural, Urban, and Suburban Differences

Students in rural schools probably have the least access to professionally trained counselors; in these schools, teachers, administrators, or part-time specialists are expected to provide guidance and counseling services. Dialogue participants from rural areas believe they have fewer resources than their counterparts in urban and suburban schools, are less likely to be visited by a wide range of colleges, and have limited, if any, access to computer data bases about colleges and careers. Additionally, the expectations of the community can place constraints on the messages conveyed to students about their options. Parents may prefer their children to remain in the community after high school, and view efforts to encourage students to attend college away from home as a threat to personal values. Peers also create a pressure on each other not to excel in school. One rural educator commented, "You can't be a boy and be smart."

Access to counselors varies widely within and between schools in urban areas. Educators from cities cited the great range of student needs and issues that their counselors must address. Counselors, they told us, "are pulled in too many directions." Urban counselors must overcome a culture of negative expectations and counter attitudes of cynicism and defeat that are manifested in low expectations and negative messages communicated to poor and minority students. These counselors must contend with peer pressure against academic achievement, lack of motivation among students, and high dropout rates. One counselor at our dialogue with the National Association of College Admissions Counselors characterized the pre-

vailing ethos in many urban schools as the "educational genocide of minority students, particularly males."

In many urban schools counselors' time is divided between students who are in trouble in school or in their personal lives, and the students who assertively are pursuing postsecondary school opportunities. These counselors are concerned that they are "losing the kids in the middle." The result is that many students with the potential to do academic work and gain a great deal from further education dismiss the idea of going to college as either impossible or impractical.

Although some suburban school districts have experienced declining enrollments and consequent school budget constraints, counselors in suburban schools seem to have lower student loads and clearer priorities set for their time. Counselors are expected to focus attention on helping students prepare and plan for college. As one suburban counselor said, "The community expects their kids to go to college, and they want me to make sure that it happens." For some suburban students the pressure from home to achieve in school can be so great that failure to perform as anticipated results in trauma for students and parents. Suburban counselors also noted the increasing need for counseling caused by the prevalence of divorce. One student was critical of his counselor who did not have time to talk with him about his parents' divorce "even though the divorce made it much harder for me to think about college." However, students from affluent families are more likely to have access to counseling resources outside of school.

The Perpetuation of Disadvantage

Often described as "gatekeepers" of the educational establishment, counselors in many schools facilitate the smooth operation of a system that limits students' access to courses that would prepare them for college. As new promotion gates, graduation requirements, and competency tests are instituted, usually counselors are called upon to monitor how well students are meeting the new standards. Counselors, too, review the cumulative records and advise students about choices for the future that appear to be "realistic" or "practical." This makes counselors the targets of criticism from those locked out of opportunities.

While counselors can limit student aspirations, the Commission notes that the problem goes far beyond the individual counselors or interactions between counselors and students. Several dialogue participants expressed the view that counselors play only a small part in any perpetuation of disadvantage and that their role must be viewed in the larger context of differential treatment that goes on in schools and in the community.

Data from the *High School and Beyond* study support this view. There is a strong relationship between curriculum program and socioeconomic status and parental education level.

- Three-fifths of the students from high socioeconomic status families were enrolled in the academic program; only one-fifth of the students from low socioeconomic status families were enrolled in that program.
- Three-fifths of the students whose parents were college graduates were enrolled in the academic program; only 22 percent of the students whose parents were not graduated from high school were in that program.
- Of seniors in the academic program, only 13 percent were from low socioeconomic status families; almost 40 percent of the seniors were from high socioeconomic status families.
- Of seniors in the academic program, only about 8 percent had parents whose education ended before high school graduation; two-thirds of the seniors had parents who were college graduates.

In contrast to these reports, the Commission heard descriptions of counseling programs that motivate students to stay in school, take more demanding courses, enter the "college pool," and raise their academic aspirations. But, in too many schools, counselors are not given the time, funds, or mandate to carry out such programs. If they are underprepared academically and worried about financial burdens, minority and economically disadvantaged students find the transition to college difficult to contemplate.

The Commission is not surprised that family income level remains a major determinant of the quality and quantity of education a student receives. Equal educational opportunity has long been a goal, and at times a policy, of the federal government. Encouraged by such programs as Upward Bound and Educational Opportunity Centers, created to be bridges to higher education, many colleges stepped up their recruitment of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and increased their financial aid and academic support programs. Important strides were made in opening postsecondary education to new populations of students. However, in recent years there has been a serious erosion in the college attendance rates of poor and minority students.

The new standards of performance for schools and students advocated by the education reform movement of the early 1980s are generally laudable. However, if they are imposed without careful planning and adequate resources for remediation, the students most likely to get caught in the bind are those with the greatest learning and school adjustment needs.

At the Commission's meeting in October 1985, one member commenting on the inequities that now exist in American schools said: "We should state clearly and unequivocally that this country's school system faces the danger of becoming two systems rather than one. One system leads to opportunity through advanced education and interesting careers; the other is for second-level citizens and it imposes limits, operates on reduced expectations, and manages to discourage and fail more children than it services well. Counselors alone cannot stop this from happening, but they can become one of the powerful forces arrayed against it."

Moving Toward Recommendations

When considering the evidence from the dialogues and the studies one member of the Commission observed, "If all students were served as well as those now best served, there would be no problem." Unfortunately, large numbers of students are not so served.

The Commission confronts a dilemma because it knows there are many aspects of schools that require rethinking and change if all students are to be served fairly and well, but in making recommendations for change, it will limit itself to suggestions about precollege guidance and counseling.

Counselors, through the nature of their work, develop a sense of the crosscurrents in schools and the way they affect individual students. This breadth of view makes counselors useful advisors to those with responsibility for major changes. Counselors can call attention to conditions in schools that are defeating or frustrating students rather than helping them succeed. The Commission believes that improved performance of guidance and counseling functions in schools can make a distinct contribution to both the enhancement of learning and the promotion of equity in education.

Summary of Issues

The Commission has identified a series of issues and questions to help focus its thinking about possible recommendations. The issues, without illustrations of the questions they suggest, follow in outline form.

- Altering conditions in the schools that affect guidance and counseling functions
- Providing for the multiple functions of precollege guidance and counseling
- Educating and training counselors to respond to students' specific needs
- Providing support services for students' families
- Highlighting early intervention to encourage individual achievement
- Easing the transition to college
- Developing students' responsibility for education and choice
- Assessing federal, state, and local initiatives
- Evaluating the quality of services

An Invitation

Recognizing that there are voices other than those that have been heard to date, we welcome the comments of people whose experiences, professional and otherwise, have led to insights within the scope of the Commission's inquiry.